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Existence VS Reality in “Who is Near, Who is Distant” & “The Means” **Mrs. Banti Ramchiary**

Asst. Professor, Dept. of English, Barama College, Barama, Assam, India

Mr. Pranab Kalita

Asst. Professor, Dept. of Philosophy, Barama College, Barama, Assam, India

Abstract

The beliefs of each individual such as “Love”, “Sacrifice” and “Existence” are interlinked and verified in every action. These beliefs are bifurcated and differentiated in the passage of time. A man’s journey to exist as individual in the society provides a platform for the possibilities of realization that sky is not the limit. Noted short story writer Mangal Singh Hazoyari’s characters also confronted with the situations which are made by circumstances. They try to visualize life and its varied emotions and moods. In his short story Hazoyari intends to present a simple human situation in the most simple way. Hareswar Basumatari’s characters are trying to shape their own destiny in the complexities of contemporary existence. The characters are very sensitive but their perceptions are distinct and vibrant in the time of needs. In the present paper an attempt has been made to highlight the importance of existence in real life situations in which the characters are for somehow or the other have to adjust with them.

Key Words: Existence, Life, Characters, Destiny.

Introduction: Among the genres of literature, short story is a popular genre even Bodo writers engaged themselves to reflect their creative expressions through their writings. The Bodo short stories opened new vistas for the development of Bodo written literature. From 1930 to 1970 a great number of short stories appeared through magazines, journals, books, newspapers etc. to signify the possibilities and potentialities of Bodo people. In 1924 “Bibar” the mouthpiece of Bodo Chatra Sanmilani under the editorship of late Satish Chandra Basumatary was a significant attempt in publishing the first Bodo short story “Dao Songnai”. However “Abari” the first short story of Bodo literature written by Ishan Mochahari was published in the journal “Hathorkhi Hala” in 1930 edited by Pramod Chandra Brahma popularized Mochahari the first short story writer of Bodo literature. This trend of writing short stories continued in the magazines like Alongbar and Bodo. Many budding writers took this genre a positive form of platform to express their creative talents. The outstanding short stories of Lila Brahma’s “Gosoni Daha”, Gohin Basumatary’s

"Goronthini Unao", Iswar Chandra Mushahary's "Benotho", Manoranjan Lahari's "Bindi" may be mentioned in this regard. In post 70's short stories, there was a sudden shift on the stories and the writers mainly concerned on the social happenings and its outcomes. In 1970, Chittaranjan Mochahari's short story "Phwimal Mijing" which is considered the first collection of short stories published in book form became a guiding light in the field of Boro short story. Nilkamal Brahma's excellent creation "Hagra Gwdwni Mwi" published in 1972 made an impressive impact among the readers and showcased the writer one of the best short story writer in Bodo literature. Brahma's stories are concerned with human pain, individual dilemma confronted in everyday life. After 1972, there was a fluidity of writing short stories among the Bodo writers. The notable anthologies by different authors may be mentioned in this regard : Manoranjan Lahari's "Solo Bidang", Haribhusan Brahma's "Srimati Durlai", Dharanidhar Wary's "Gandusingni Laijam Gangshe", Katindra Swargiary's "Hongla Pandit", Janil Kumar Brahma's "Dumphaoni Phitha", Nabin Malla Boro's "Haadan" etc. In their own language and style, the writers of Bodo short stories are able to express the lives and thoughts of grass root people. They have depicted in their writings the tensions, the crisis, the worries and anxieties of the Bodo social life. In the writings of contemporary writers, the scenes of ethnic uprising, atrocities, the suffering of the common people are highly picturised. The writers have delved deep into the existence of morality and identity and also the dimensions of life among the Bodos. The writers present their stories with a new outlook and expand their writings with vigour and enthusiasm.

Who is Near, Who is Distant: One of the literary luminaries of contemporary short story writing in Bodo Literature Hazoyari candidly explores human psyche and complex human relationships. The protagonist of his story comes to realize that he is solely responsible for his decisions and destiny, he feels unnerved. Hazoyari's well acclaimed story "Who is Near, Who is Distant" is the story of a family that seeks to exist in the hearts of each member of the family. The writer also put the focus of attention on the probing of the essence of existence and the value of consciousness which is primarily concerned with the human condition as such.

Ramaun around whom the tapestry of the story is woven, is young man who is bright, brilliant and sensitive. The central meaning of the story lies in the character of Ramaun, a man who tries to control the situation but suffers quietly due to the unexpected incident of his affectionate elder sister Jarau. His heart is filled with life nourishing emotion of love. There could not be a more tragic situation than the one that Ramaun faces. The perception is somewhat different from the expectations one can have. This has been very well displayed when Hazoyari probes into his heart and discloses Ramaun's condition of mental struggle relating to his cordial nature for his elder sister. The departure is as painful as the parting of a loved one as the mental condition of Jarau forms an integral part of the emotional make up of Ramaun.

"Jarau turned hysterical. There was a mortifying change in her demeanour thereafter- she was careless in her eating, living and sleeping. After another fifteen

days the news broke; Jarau herself was missing. I was at my wit’s end. I believed that Jarau was still alive and thus I began searching for her frantically. But all ended in vain.”

The writer moreover presents the growth and maturity of individual consciousness. It is in this feeling that the love, care and understanding he had for his sister offers a soothing effect in the burden of his later life. It is also significant to note that Ramaun has been delineated in an altogether different way, is a thinking, feeling human being. He registers his thoughts so brilliantly as the part of his reactions to the situations. A great sense of endurance and stoic acceptance can be perceived:

“Thus I fell sick, You know, Bilai, the corpse that I saw hanging was that of Jarau. In that high grassland overlooking us, the body of Jarau was laid to rest. There was a Kadamba tree there. My father has cut it down. I feel as though Jarau calls me out from it day in and day out. I cannot withstand her beckoning.”

The inner strength of the character of Ramaun is brought vividly home in that gesture of Ramaun when he chooses to match all fate with the nude dynamism of his heart and soul in a terrific line:

“She brought me up lovingly after my mother’s death. I have not yet been able to forget her affection and perhaps shall not forget her forever. Her name was Jarau. She and Adam loved each other like you and I do..... But alas, within a fortnight, a telegram addressing Jarau came. It contained the words, “Adam died in an accident.”

In case of Ramaun, the tensions actually issue forth from the pressures of his family background. The writer presents Bilai’s pain and plight more comprehensively and closely. She remains a mute spectator of life, standing apart. She certainly gives us the impression of an uncomplaining and contented wife. She desired to discover a meaning. She began to feel a great emotional vacuum. As a matter of fact, she realizes herself as an unfettered individual. She remains all through her life searching for love and understanding. She is too silent for the family and the world distrusts her silence. Hazoyari describes the pitiable plight of a defenceless woman who needs love, consideration, sympathy and desires of a loving husband, warmth and home. Her grief has been disclosed quite freely and openly:

“After our marriage, I thought, the two of us have built a world of happiness and companionship. But it has all been belied. I served you with my heart and soul submitted at your alter, but I could not make you happy. Speak out frankly. What is that makes you confused? How can I know what lapses I have made if you do not let it out?”

Here an attempt has been made by Hazoyari to present Bilai as a woman who has to live in the family accepting all her uncontrollable passion of disgust and dissatisfaction without raising any voice or making resistance. Her dissatisfaction is clear and has profound insights into the inner depths of her mind. The woman in her cannot be completely shadowed and so

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she pleads for authentic love and sense of security for her out of her own knowledge. This is to be chiefly noticed in the story that Hazoyari has very effectively recorded the discussion between Ramaun and Bilai which very well reveals the force of narrative impact in the story. Ramaun said,

"It is not a fault or mistake on your part, darling. It is the nature of the whole womenfolk. I have forgiven you."

To the sensible and sensitive readers Bilai's sharp and bitter comments to Ramaun's deep feeling for a lady too are highly justifiable. Bilai feels hurt and out of uncontrollable passion at his callousness she asks him in disgust. After all Bilai accepts that Ramaun is committed to his family. Bilai's sense of understanding on a situation is very clear and distinct. This is perhaps true when she murmurs:

"Realising her own misapprehension, Bilai felt ashamed. She held herself guilty and giving him a tender caress told Ramaun, "what the hell have I been playing at? How have I been so narrow minded? Kindly forgive me."

The Means: A very promising short story writer and also a teacher by profession Hareswar Basumatari has contributed and enriched the treasure house of Bodo Literature through his works. Being a gifted short story writer with an artistic perfection and simple expression he is more concerned with the human pain, the problems and dilemmas faced by the ordinary people where one's existence is covered by the societal pressure. In his touching short story "*The Means*" very deftly, he portrays a character like Bakhunda who confronts with individual dilemma and suffers for his inability to cope with the situation. The situation he describes here is very common and is seen in every other household.

The protagonist of "*The Means*", Bakhunda is a man of utter frustration and his sense of failure to maintain his household duties is the key feature of the story. Though being a master of his own possibilities he feels a sense of loss and also feels angry to realize that he is dying in his own faults:

"I can no longer do it. Don't fall back only upon me. You should also find ways to earn somehow."

We find that in the story Bakhunda is concerned with himself as a victim. Having his wife and children and without his ancestral lands the life of poor Bakhunda was remain the same as the other landless people had. The condition of Bakhunda is out and out appalling and he is held responsible for all the suffering he had to undergo in his life.

"He had to hand over his occupied lands to others and he himself turned into a hawker wage labourer-cum-firewood."

A dominant note of despair and suffering is still prevalent in the story when he returned home without bread and butter and found his two kids lying asleep with empty stomach. The expectations of each member of the family for better living is justifiable but the impossibility to run the family as shown by Bakhunda is also very sympathetic as far as the

need of the time is concerned. Bakhunda not only criticized himself but also relieved himself of bursting his agony on his own family members. He is also conscious of the paradox of the ideological structure that situates him in such a difficult role. His intention is not to dehumanize others. He feels insecure because of the mental suffering which leads him to desolation. He is unable to proceed with his thoughts for sometime but the words of his wife strikes into his ear as the bolt from the blue:

"Tharli, I alongwith your younger brother and sister am going to find the liquor-making herbs and have some rice by begging. If I get, I shall have to prepare liquor to sell. Your father is sleeping, take care of him."

The scene of pleading money from door to door cannot solve the problem of starvation but the burden of empty stomachs will definitely be lightened for time being. Bakhunda did not anticipate for showing off their woes before other people and couldnot prepare himself with the decision taken by his wife. In the story it is also evident that Bakhunda remains powerless in the hands of increasing situation. Sonaram's offer for a hundred rupee note to Tharli to "sell" herself was unjust and against her will. The rage Tharli has shown for this filthy insinuations is however praiseworthy. A conscious urge for the well being of the family is distinctly revealed in the lines when Tharli realized the needs. She acknowledges as much when she admits:

"No brother, I do not know the value of life on that day. So I was fummy with you. But today, I have come to understand that the agony of the stomach is more urgent than the purity of the body and mind. You offered me a hundred rupee note and I turned it away. You can pay it today. I shall not refuse. If you feel, you may come daily and leave your money this way."

Tharli is victimized for the wrong doings she suffered. The emotional outburst of Tharli arouses sympathy on one side and appears as real as life itself on the other side. The problem extends beyond the realm of personal choice. It is also significant that Bakhunda submitted himself in the nightmare of suffering, loss and frustration. His silence is the reminder of the problems he decided to call home.

Conclusion: Ramaun's decision at the end is psychologically quite convincing and dramatically quite credible. There is no inconsistency in the portrayal of Ramaun. Ramaun at the end of '*Who is Near, who is distant*' is an entirely different person from what he is at the beginning. By the time the story ends, Ramaun has undergone a transformation. Bakhunda's anguish in '*The Means*' is domestic and mundane. The situation where he lives is not accessible. The theatre of human survival against one's will is a comment on the inevitability of the presence of one's doings. Basumatari's writing has retained its appeal for his subtle but incisive questioning of life's complexities. He has remained very truthful in presenting the characters in the situations which are not really desirable in one's life to survive.

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